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He made the
supply trains
run on time

McNAMARA: His Ordeal in the Pentagon. By Henry L. Trehwitt. Harper & Row, 307 pp. \$7.95

By Ronald Steel

This confirms what we long suspected about the man who in his seven years in office doubled the military budget to \$80 billion; streamlined the war machine, multiplied the missile force, and obsessively persisted in the TFX fiasco; and whose proudest accomplishment was to increase our ability to fight non-nuclear wars—an achievement that made Vietnam possible. Applying his managerial experience at Ford to the military and political labyrinths of the Pentagon, McNamara was a ruthless, often brilliant, administrator. But his political judgment was narrow, his preoccupation with efficiency all-consuming, and his humane instincts at war with his loyalty to authority and his faith in technology. A superb technician, he carried out orders, never questioned the wider purposes of the war he engineered with such chilling efficiency, and meekly shuffled off stage when he was no longer wanted.

The McNamara story is not tragic, for that implies a higher form of self-recognition absent from this tale. Nor is it even pathetic. Rather it is a now almost-classic account of intelligence in the service of power, and organizational efficiency as an end in itself. To reflect on the career of Robert McNamara is to understand how German intellectuals such as Albert Speer could have served the Nazi war machine. The kind of mind that asks *how* rather than *why* will always be honored so long as it performs the functions assigned to it. The fact that McNamara was able to rationalize his role as engineer of the Vietnam war until late 1967, when fatigue and disillusion made the effort almost insupportable, is what gives his case a special meaning.

A good part of this comes through in Trehwhitt's *McNamara*, a useful account of a man whose most interesting feature was his capacity for self-deception. Diplomatic correspondent of *Newsweek*, and editor of

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The accomplishments are real, though some are temporal, and others of dubious desirability. He asserted the authority of his computer-wielding civilians over the military; resisted numerous pork-barrel projects foisted on him by military contractors, gadget-happy generals, and brass-minded congressmen; helped push through the Senate the nuclear test-ban treaty of 1963; and transformed a military force based on deterrence through nuclear weapons into a powerful instrument of aggressive diplomacy capable of intervening anywhere in the world at any chosen level of violence.

But that was near the end, when McNamara's theories of "flexible response" seemed a formula for unending war rather than a device to avoid the choice between embarrassment or atomic holocaust. In the beginning,

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